

HCS HB 296 -- FIRST INFORMER BROADCASTERS ACT

SPONSOR: Kelley

COMMITTEE ACTIONS: Voted "Do Pass with Amendments" by the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness by a vote of 7 to 2. Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Select Committee on State and Local Governments by a vote of 10 to 0.

This bill establishes the First Informer Broadcasters Act that allows Missouri broadcasters, in cooperation with the Department of Public Safety, to develop comprehensive coordinated plans for preparing for and responding to an emergency or disaster.

Any statewide organization or any member of a statewide organization that represents broadcasters or any other provider that uses emerging technologies may establish a program for training and certifying broadcast engineers and technical personnel as first informer broadcasters. Those who complete the program must receive statewide recognized credentials to certify that they are first informers.

Each program established by the bill must provide training and education concerning:

- (1) Restoring, repairing, and resupplying any facilities and equipment of a broadcaster in an area affected by an emergency or disaster; and
- (2) The personal safety of a first informer broadcaster in an area affected by an emergency or disaster.

The bill requires state and local governmental agencies to allow those certified as first informer broadcasters access to areas affected by emergency or disaster to the extent practicable and consistent with not endangering public safety or inhibiting recovery efforts for the purposes of restoring, repairing, or resupplying a facility or equipment critical to the ability of a broadcaster to acquire, produce, and transmit essential emergency- or disaster-related public information programming. The Missouri Broadcasters Association must pay the costs of developing and implementing the training program.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the bill will help coordination during a natural disaster and a state emergency. This could be a tool for law enforcement and the media during a natural disaster without limiting the access for non-credentialed media sources. The credential process will allow law enforcement officers to identify media members who have gone through natural disaster

training. Supporters say that the credentials will allow the media to communicate where to go, safety measures, and severe weather information.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Kelley and Missouri Broadcasters Association.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.